

God vs. Sports: What Defines Your Identity?

Wearing a 49ers jersey to the Seahawks stadium was like going into the lions' den. Because of whom I represented, I faced jeers and cheers, love and hate, hugs and mugs of beer, acceptance and rejection, affirmation and confrontation.

It was a NFL playoff game with the Super Bowl appearance in the balance, but my jersey taught me a lesson about "fandamonium" and the "brand" I represent. Hoping you will take a seat in the classroom as well.

The recent World Cup brought the world together, but make no mistake—every individual drew a line at their international border, marking their *identity* and proudly telegraphing how they would spend *energy* and *express* their loyalty.

My passion for my sports teams is a matter of personal pride. I have a deep national, cultural or relational bond there. No one who knows me is really surprised. I am competitive, loyal and love sport.

But I wonder, when push comes to shove, if God's men are more inclined to represent their team or country in a more energetic manner than their Savior? So, here are three lessons to learn from our affection for sport that we can apply to ourselves.

1. Where you're from is who you are. What are your roots personally? Wearing your colors typically represents where you are from i.e., your country, state, region or city. One tracks naturally with the other because together they create an *identity*.

It's easy to wear a jersey from our hometown. We see someone else wearing our colors and we relate. We're rooted. Our

identity is supported by others from our locality. This sporting dimension, according to the Bible, operates the exact same way in the spiritual dimension of our lives. Where you are from is who you are:

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20).

See the connection between “citizenship” and eagerness. By nature of salvation—i.e. Jesus sacrificing his life to bear our sins—we have become citizens of heaven and heirs in the family of God. That’s who we are, where we’re from and to whom we belong. Naturally, that’s whom we should represent. So, why do men prefer to identify with their physical locality rather than their eternal heritage? It’s because men feel safer identifying with their temporary homeland than their eternal one. One identity is stronger than the other.

The Bible refers to those who choose to follow Jesus as heirs of God, and the Heavenly Kingdom is their truest country of origin and primary identity.

2. Our energy is spent based on our identity. Once you know your identity, putting energy behind it is also easy. For sports fans, we wear our team colors and jerseys, coordinate gatherings, plan to attend or host, discipline our schedules, buy gear and equip ourselves for the tailgate with the big-screen display. Then, we read all the articles about our team and watch ESPN for the news so we know the latest about our beloved team.

But if we were to apply that same energy towards our real identity, we would be proud of serving Jesus, hosting men’s gatherings, planning in advance, buying resources to support our faith, and reading the Bible to know our Father better. Energy always follows identity. Our locale is merely temporary. But our destination is eternity.

3. We express loyalty based on where we invest our energy. If

you're from Denver, you'll spend energy on Broncos gear and gatherings, and, during the game, you'll cheer and drink with every point put on the scoreboard.

Cheering, a form of worship, is an expression of loyalty which is based on where we've invested our energy, because of our identity.

While sports create opportunities to express our identities and energies, if we connect with our eternal heritage, we'll express our loyalties with praise, worshipping the "I am" who loved and created us in the first place.

Here's the dangerous part. If you express your team loyalty in a crowd of random—or partial—observers, you may be persecuted. Wearing a 49ers jersey at the Seahawks' home field brought me much closer to persecution than I could have imagined.

Still, if we are willing to express our faith in God in a manner others may see it, then we will be rewarded.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12).

We can learn from Timothy who breaks down this simple argument:

"But you, man of God (identity), flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness (energy). Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses (expression)." (1 Tim. 6:11-12).

Feelings run deep on both sides of the ball. But if we could only translate our identity, energy and expression in our

lives for Christ, we could serve a higher purpose; much higher than who wins the big game.

Kenny Luck, founder of Every Man Ministries, men's pastor at Saddleback Church, and ChristianMingle advisory board member, provides biblically oriented teaching and leadership for men and pastors seeking relevant, timely material that battle cultural, worldly concepts threatening men and God's men. Follow Kenny and Every Man Ministries now on Facebook, Twitter (@everyMM) and YouTube.

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